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WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Chilean Catholic Church Stressing Human Rights

The Catholic Church in Chile appears to be taking a stronger stand on human rights issues. Recent statements by church leaders suggest they are emphatic of the military government's complicity in the possible death and disappearance of Chilean exiles, some of which have received wide coverage in the South American press.

The bishop of Santiago addressed a mass last week for the families of 119 persons, mostly members of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left, who allegedly have been killed or wounded by government forces or have reported missing abroad under mysterious circumstances. The bishop's words about the need for Chileans to overcome "fear and insecurity" left no doubt among his listeners that he was denouncing the junta's handling of the matter.

Chile's press says that a number of the Chilean exiles were killed in gun battles with Argentine police and that others were killed in a purge by the Movement of the Revolutionary Left. The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights in Santiago believes that these deaths were originally "denied" by Chilean security forces in answer for the disappearance.

The bishop's words are that the 119 were detained by the military government, that in custody, and were disposed of in Chile. Right-wing Argentinians claim to the Argentine government may have collaborated with Chilean intelligence forces to plant reports on the alleged

clashes in Argentina.

President Pinochet pledged in a meeting with Cardinal Silva several weeks ago that the government would look into the disappearances, but [redacted] does not believe the Cardinal's strategy could exert much of an impact on Pinochet, shortly after the meeting. Cardinal Silva gave the first hint that the church was taking position with the government; he then appealed for a crusade for moral support and tolerance.

In a recent press statement, the Cardinal said he had no objection to publication of the press committee's findings on the missing exiles, thereby implicitly encouraging its probe.

[redacted] Cardinal Silva also authorized—or at least one

series of—the mass offered last week for the families of the missing persons. The Chilean church's views have been echoed by the papal nuncio, who expressed shock and the "disgust" of ambassadors assembled in Santiago over the fate of the missing Chileans.

While the church is not likely to trade charges openly with the government, its spokesmen will probably focus attention on one or several areas:

- The failure of officials to explain satisfactorily the disappearance of persons presumably detained by security forces.

- Continued indications that the regime is not abiding by new national security laws that place restrictions on illegal detention and torture.

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